

Rape, torture and beatings: in Ireland, the Roman Catholic cover-up goes on



The new Archbishop of Westminster Vincent Nichols has condemned those responsible for the terrible litany of abuse unveiled a few minutes ago in Ireland and has demanded that they be brought to justice.

His is a lone voice though. Few others in the Church seems to be commenting, from the Vatican down. No perpetrators have been named or shamed. There will be no criminal prosecutions as a result of this report. What an utter, disgusting, unforgivable scandal. No wonder the brother of one of the victims, pictured here, is so upset.

[Will the Church survive this revolting saga?](#) Will we ever know the true tally of evil in this unredeemed catalogue of sin?

In an interview with ITV's News at Ten to be broadcast tonight, on the eve of his enthronement tomorrow, Archbishop Nichols says, 'It's very distressing and very disturbing and my heart goes out today first of all to those people who will find that their stories are now told in public... Secondly, I think of those in religious orders and some of the clergy in Dublin who have to face these facts from their past which instinctively and quite naturally they'd rather not look at. That takes courage, and also we shouldn't forget that this account today will also overshadow all of the good that they also did.'

Asked whether those who perpetrated violence and abuse should be held to account, Nichols says, 'Yes they should, no matter how long ago it happened. In this country now we have a very steady and reliable system of co-operation with police and social services who actually now hold us in good regard. They know that we are reliable and trustworthy partners. Those that abused the trust that was placed in them should be brought to public account.'

AP reports: 'A fiercely debated, nine-year investigation into Ireland's Roman Catholic-run institutions says priests and nuns terrorized thousands of boys and girls in workhouse-style schools for decades _ and government inspectors failed to stop the chronic beatings, rapes and humiliation. High Court Justice Sean Ryan on Wednesday unveiled the 2,600-page final report of Ireland's Commission to Inquire Into Child Abuse, which is based on testimony from thousands of former students as well as retired officials from more than 250 church-run institutions.

'More than 30,000 children deemed to be petty thieves, truants or from dysfunctional families _ a category that often included unmarried mothers _ were sent to Ireland's austere network of industrial schools, reformatories, orphanages and hostels from the 1930s until the last church-run facilities shut in the 1990s. The report found that molestation and rape were "endemic; in boys' facilities, chiefly run by the Christian Brothers. Girls supervised by orders of nuns, chiefly the Sisters of Mercy, suffered much less sexual abuse but frequent assaults and humiliation designed to make them feel worthless. "In some schools a high level of ritualized beating was routine. ... Girls were struck with implements designed to maximize pain and were struck on all parts of the body," the report said.

"Personal and family denigration was widespread." Victims of the system have long demanded that the truth of their experiences be documented and made public, so that children in Ireland never endure such suffering again. But most leaders of religious orders have rejected the allegations as exaggerations and lies, and testified to the commission that any abuses were the responsibility of often long-dead individuals. Wednesday's five-volume report sides almost completely with the former students' accounts.

It concludes that church officials encouraged ritual beatings and consistently shielded their orders' paedophiles from arrest amid a culture of self-serving secrecy.

"A climate of fear, created by pervasive, excessive and arbitrary punishment, permeated most of the institutions and all those run for boys. Children lived with the daily terror of not knowing where the next beating was coming from," the report concluded.

The commission said overwhelming, consistent testimony from still-traumatized men and women, now in their 50s to 80s, had demonstrated beyond a doubt that the entire system treated children more like prison inmates and slaves than people with legal rights and human potential.

The report proposed 21 ways the government could recognize past wrongs, including building a permanent memorial, providing counseling and education to victims, and improving Ireland's current child protection services.

But its findings will not be used for criminal prosecutions _ in part because the Christian Brothers successfully sued the commission in 2004 to keep the identities of all of its members, dead or alive, unnamed in the report. No real names, whether of victims or perpetrators, appear in the final document. Irish church leaders and religious orders all declined to comment Wednesday, citing the need to read the massive document first. The Vatican also declined to comment.

The Irish government already has funded a parallel compensation system that has paid 12,000 abuse victims an average of £65,000. About 2,000 claims remain outstanding. Victims receive payouts only if they waive their rights to sue the state or church. Hundreds of others have rejected that condition and taken their abusers and those church employers to court. Wednesday's report said children had no safe way to tell authorities about the assaults they were suffering, particularly the sexual aggression from church officials and older inmates in boys' institutions.

The report said Education Department inspectors visited infrequently, warned church authorities in advance they were coming and typically did not speak to any child residents. "The management did not listen to or believe children when they complained," the commission found. "At best, the abusers were moved, but nothing was done about the harm done to the child. At worst, the child was blamed and seen as corrupted by the sexual activity, and was punished severely."

The report cited numerous examples where school managers told police about child abusers who were not church officials _ but never did this when one of their own had committed the crime. "Contrary to the congregations' claims that the recidivist nature of sexual offending was not understood, it is clear from the documented cases that they were aware of the propensity for abusers to re-abuse," it said.

Religious orders were chiefly concerned about preventing scandal, not the danger to children, it said. The commission also condemned Ireland's Education Department for aiding the abusive culture through infrequent, toothless inspections that deferred to church authority. Inspectors were supposed to restrict the use of corporal punishment and make sure the children were adequately fed, clothed and educated _ but the report called those inspections "fundamentally flawed." It said a lone inspector was responsible for monitoring more than 50 industrial schools, schools were told about the visits in advance and inspectors rarely talked to the children.

The report also highlighted the rarity of human kindness in the institutions. "A word of consideration or encouragement, or an act of sympathy or understanding, had a profound effect. Adults in their 60s and 70s recalled seemingly insignificant events that had remained with them all their lives," the report said. "Often the act of kindness, recalled in such a positive light, arose from the simple fact that the staff member had not given a beating when one was expected."

One survivor of survivor of one of the state-funded, Roman Catholic Church-run children's institutions told AFP that some of them were like Gulags, where vulnerable minors worked as slave labourers. "These places weren't care homes, they were Gulags," John Kelly, now coordinator of the Survivors of Child Abuse (SOCA) group said, adding that inmates had to make "the instruments of our own torture." He said children were "rented out to farmers as slave labourers," faced regular floggings and were known by numbers, not names.

For 10 years, the government-appointed commission has probed allegations of sexual, physical and emotional abuse suffered by thousands of the estimated 30,000-40,000 children who passed through the system.

Kelly described how he lived in an institution run by a Catholic religious order in a former British military barracks in central Ireland. "There were 30 foot walls. It was a military garrison. It was maintained that way with the holding cells being used for children. They didn't use your name.

"We were each given a number. "I wasn't John Kelly, I was number 253, I will always remember that.

"We were known as residents but residents don't get dragged out of their bed and flogged naked in the middle of the night. "They don't have to get out of bed in all weathers and work for farmers for money for the religious orders and the state."

The children often had to fend for themselves, he said. "We made our own clothes, we made our own boots. We didn't get much of the food from the farms where we worked. The brothers and the priests got it.

"We made the straps they beat us with to their particular design. Some of them (the religious staff) were so evil that old English three-penny bits had to be sown into the straps.

"Some used bits of copper or lead. We had to make them to their instructions. We were making the instruments of our own torture," he said.

Kelly fears thousands of victims will be "bitterly disappointed" and feel "cheated and deceived" by the report. He expects that all the judicial Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse will do "is simply acknowledge abuse happened, say it was systemic and brutal and that the state could have done more to protect the kids.

"I suppose that is some comfort but the wounds will remain open for the simple reason that issues were not addressed adequately and there is still a lack of accountability. No one is likely to be named and shamed."

AFP also reports that compensation has been sought by Irish people now living in over 30 countries with 40 percent of applications coming from women. Some 61 percent of those claiming compensation for abuse live in Ireland with 33 percent in Britain and a further four percent in Australia and the US.

A government redress body running in parallel with the judicial commission has already paid out almost one billion euros in compensation and legal fees to some 12,500 of more than 14,500 victims who claimed they were abused in the institutions.

Mainly Catholic Ireland has been rocked by recurring revelations of clerical sex abuse of children. Another major report is due next month on abuse by Catholic priests working in parish churches around the capital and the Archbishop of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin, warned last month that it would "shock us all."

Many of the victims had reported the abuse when they were children but were not believed. Campaigns by victims and a series of television documentaries and police inquiries in the 1990s led to the creation of the commission.

In 1999, former Prime Minister Bertie Ahern made an unprecedented apology to the victims for Ireland's "collective failure to intervene, to detect their pain, to come to their rescue."

Many of the children ended up in the institutions as a result of family break-up, the death of one parent, because they were illegitimate or after being caught for truancy from school or petty crimes.

In a 2003 interim report, the commission issued findings on one institution, a former fishery in Baltimore in County Cork, south-west Ireland, that was under the control of the local bishop.

It operated between 1887 and 1950 and 21 former pupils recounted an experience of life in the 1930s and 1940s that the commission said was "so harsh and deprived by the standards of today as to verge on the unbelievable."

The sex abuse suffered by 15 of them was so severe that they had either not told their wives or had only told them recently. The commission found a number of those in authority and older boys in the school imposed a regime of severe physical punishment and serious violent sexual abuse and rape of inmates.

"From the evidence, a picture emerged which is consistent with the presence in Baltimore School of a sexual predator, probably a homosexual paedophile, who systematically preyed on and sexually abused vulnerable children in a pervasive and indiscriminate manner, regularly and over a period of time; a perpetrator whose modus operandi was the inducement of fear and apprehension in the victim," it said.

<http://timescolumns.typepad.com/gledhill/2009/05/archbishop-of-westminster-child-abusers-must-be-brought-to-account.html>